

Jack Kelly
Interview by Nancy Solomon
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Side A

Late 1940s – 50s: fort on North side of Gardiners' Island. Road washed away. Erosion. Hay Beach – named because British brought horses there to eat salt hay during occupation.

Waterfront development since 1970s. None on his street prior to 1971. Erosion due to jetties. Trees were falling down.

Grass shrimp lived near Southold. Attracted weakfish to Peconics. Port of Egypt marina was originally “a vast tidal wetland.” Fishing station now – huge marina. Mosquito ditches, sprayed with oil. Residents dumped fill at fishing station. Made marina out of it.

Riverhead sewage treatment plant opened in late 1950s. Fish traps between Riverhead and Montauk. Olson – oyster harvester. After treatment plant opened catch dropped down to nothing within 2-3 years. As development increased, decline followed. Could fill “up a rowboat with scallops just by walking around and picking them up.” (1950s.)

Schools of porpoises came into the bay until 1960s. CCA treated lumber, fertilizers. “It was an incremental decline, year by year.” 1970s – beginning – noticed changes.

Jack's house – eel grass (dead) started appearing on the beach. Brown tide – 1985. Peconic Estuary Program – beginnings. Marine scientists blame brown tide for difficulties. Jack says it's not true. Lived in Southold.

Side B

Fished at Nassau Point near Robins Island. Plum Gut. 1950s went to Gardiners Bay. “must have been paved with yellowtail flounder.” Gone by 1970s. CCA timber leaches arsenic into water. Streams empty into Peconic River. Chlorine from sewage treatment plans – affects bays. One on Shelter Island Heights. Everyone else uses septic system. Some use a counter-acting agent.

Lived on potato farm plot near Jessups in Southold. Cory's Creek had great shellfishing. Baymen worked there all the time. Launched boats from his lawn at 4 am. Scallops need light, so they were usually found in water up to 5 -6 feet deep. Filter feeders. Need plankton for food. 10 feet or less best. Cory's Creek – eel grass was plentiful. Live for a few years.

Cull board on boat. Shelter Island baymen scalloped on the island. Stayed near home. Holiday money. Depression years – local residents scalloped all day long.

Oyster companies and lease system. Shelter Island Oyster Company. Robins Island had oysters. 1970s – no oyster harvests off Ram Island. Oysters were dying. Boats with big dredges.